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A STUDY OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS BY STUDENTS



ORIGINAL DESIGN BY A
PUPIL OF THE SCHOOL OF
ETHICAL CULTURE

THE Metropolitan Museum of Art is so vast a storehouse of so great a number of things "tempting to the eye," that the blessings of aesthetic pleasure or scientific

knowledge fall only upon those who understand the measure of a fine restraint. Shall we visit the museum for the sake of visiting the museum, or shall we visit the museum for the sake of satisfying some pre-developed hunger? The first purpose leads to scattered observations that result in vague general impressions. Such impressions dull the edge of keen perception; and while an emotion of pleasure may result, it is more than probable that weariness and surfeit will haunt the laggard step. The second purpose, concentrating the attention upon a few related objects whose image is already in the mind, satisfies an existing hunger and thereby intensifies the result both in terms of aesthetic enjoyment and related knowledge. The trained eye is the companion of the trained mind and both are the product of a concentrated interest whose intensity is measured by its ability to select and discard at will things native or foreign to its purpose.

We may be living in the days of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; or perhaps we are marching with the great army of crusaders across seas and continents; or, as hero-worshippers, we may be thrilled by the deeds of a Greek Ulysses, a Roman Cæsar, or the inspired Maid of Orleans. Thus re-living the days of chivalry, gorgeous trappings, knights in armor, the splendor of lordly hall and kingly court are far more real than knives and forks, tram-cars and steam-

engines, men and women of today whom we see only with the literal eye. Possessing first this splendid vision, the eye of imagination caught by the glint of armor, shining battle axe, sculptured horseman, time-worn tapestry, such as we find in this rich museum, builds a world of romance, of love and hate, of song and adventure, of passion and glory, of courage, devotion, loyalty, that illumines the past and becomes prophetic of the future.

From this larger conception embracing the material form, to the concise beauty of the product itself, is but a natural step, and who may determine from their close relation exactly the process by which the two are bound together? We may be sure, however, that the carved spear-head, the intricate inlay of zithern or carved chest, the elegantly woven pattern of brocaded silk, the strong sinews of the sculptured horse, the tense vitality of the rider, become of absorbing interest in themselves, since, having played a part in a larger world of life, they satisfy that hunger of the imagination that has already scaled the heavens and glorified the earth. Therefore, the mind grasps with joy the concrete symbol of its impetuous flight as an image upon which it may expend itself in passionate devotion.

It is here indeed that all the arts play together, as different instruments in an orchestral score. But while poetry and song, music and the dance prepare the way, the arts of form alone compel the eye. For as the limited vision hinges to a larger prototype, so in turn does that passion for beauty discover in color, line, rhythm, proportion, all that is desirable, all that is admirable for its own satisfaction.

There is a vast difference between these two modes of approach. For students who come to the museum to see the "glories of the world," there is only one way. Whatever satisfies a well-defined desire, whatever stimulates a larger emotional sympathy, gratifies the heart and feeds the soul. Life is enriched. The museum has done its work. It was with such ardent interest that a group of students from the Ethical Culture School

visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art last year to study the Greek Vase Collection. Design and representation, the function of each, the meeting-place of both as illustrated by the Greek vase, was knowledge already their own. Line, form, color, proportion, to them were not meaningless terms. The importance of symbolism and the decorative spirit in contrast to realistic literalness, had already a place in their minds. The names, shapes, uses of kantharos, amphora, lekythos, and kylix were already familiar. Therefore, what wonder that the vases themselves, and the tales written so naïvely and so charmingly upon their forms, opened a world of keen enjoyment. The delicate drawings on the lekythoi in which you may trace the fine hair line of the master's hand or feast your eye upon the creamy whiteness of the slip, or the more fleeting colors of garment and hair, so delicate, so reserved, so refined, opened a door into the world of Duris, Euphronios,

Brygos, which no written word could have told half so well. It was, indeed, as if one held speech with a spirit who two thousand years or more ago wrote a personal note upon a bit of clay.

Another experiment, concerning itself wholly with color, resulted in practically the discovery of a new sense. Color, apart from form, has great power over the observer, if approached in the right way. One square inch of color found in primitive textiles, on Persian tiles, or Rhodian plaques, on a primitive painting by a Sienese painter, may produce an exhilaration comparable only to an amber wine. To those who possess the art of discrimination, who have a clear vision, who open a desiring heart, the arts of form and color possess an enchantment that recreates the soul and opens a new heaven and a new earth. Well is it, then, if in youth we discover what we desire, and claim a share in the rich inheritance of the ages.

IRENE WEIR.



ORIGINAL DESIGN BY A PUPIL AFTER A
VISIT TO THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART